

[Return to Hawai'i State Judiciary Press Releases](#)



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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Third Judicial Circuit Launches Drug Court**

The Third Judicial Circuit recently launched the Big Island Drug Court, a minimum 12-month treatment-based program funded to serve 50 adult offenders. The Hawai'i State Judiciary also has drug courts on O'ahu and Maui as well as a Juvenile Drug Court on O'ahu.

The Big Island Drug Court is designed to channel adult, nonviolent, substance-abusing offenders from clogged courtrooms of the traditional criminal justice system to a new type of courtroom environment, where they receive comprehensive treatment and services, such as employment and education. Participants are intensely supervised, must submit to frequent drug tests, and initially must appear weekly before the presiding judge.

Graduated sanctions, including jail, are imposed for noncompliance and incentives are awarded for positive adjustments. Offenders terminated from the program will return to the traditional criminal justice system while graduates will have their respective cases dismissed.

Two drug courts serve West and East Hawai'i. Chief Judge Ronald Ibarra is the presiding Drug Court judge for West Hawai'i, where court is held at 9:00 a.m. every Tuesday at the Kona Circuit Court. Judge Greg Nakamura is the presiding Drug Court judge for East Hawai'i, where court is held at 2:00 p.m. each Thursday at the Hilo Circuit Court.

"The mission of the Big Island Drug Court is to address societal problems relating to substance abuse," said Ibarra. "By properly treating drug offenders, we can reduce societal and economic costs and protect the community at the same time." Nationwide, drug courts have proven to be cost efficient and effective. In Hawai'i, treating an adult offender in drug court costs up to \$8,000 yearly, while incarceration costs approximately \$32,000 per year. Each offender in drug court for a year saves the state about \$24,000 and frees jail space for more violent offenders. Drug court graduates are also more likely to return to society as productive, law-abiding citizens, thereby reducing recidivism.

After attending a Juvenile Drug Court training program next year, drug court officials of the Third Circuit Court plan to establish a "one-stop" drug court to handle adults and juveniles and their families.

Drug Court offices will soon be located at 81-940 Heleki'i Street in Kona and at 1420 Kilauea Avenue in Hilo. Contact the Drug Court staff at 938-6466 in Kona and 938-6467 in Hilo.

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